

Halo 5: The Darkest Hour

by The Last True Hero

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Summary: In the wake of Requiem, and the loss of Cortana, John-117 was left adrift. Now, with the Remnant striking hard at the heart of the UNSC, can he find his purpose once more? The race is on to secure the Absolute Record and the fate of Earth and all her colonies...

1. Back in the Saddle

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HALO 5 : The Darkest Hour

Chapter One - Back in the Saddle

"What happens to a hero after the battle? There is no happily ever after."

SKYFALL CITY, REACH

MAY 2558

For all the war, all the infighting and destruction and death, humanity had always survived. Had always rebuilt in the wake of disaster. Millions killed, cities bombed to hell and back, and the humans would slither in with the aftermath and begin the process of renewal. In the current time, though, the scale was so much bigger. Gone were the days where a simple city was considered an unimaginable scale. Now it was entire planets, with billions of lives extinguished in the heartbeat of an instant.

Oh, yes, humanity was no stranger to war.

And, John-117 contemplated as he looked over Skyfall from his perch in one of _Eagle Watch_'s watchtowers, it was a fact that had been proven twice over. Humanity had once manned an empire that dwarfed the size and prosperity of the UNSC and UEG, more than a hundred thousand years ago when the Forerunners were in their prime. The Flood had come, and forced the ancient human empire to expand out, into Forerunner space. The war on two fronts had cost them, and in punishment broke humanity down, back to an age without advanced technology.

But, over time, in the wake of the Forerunner's demise, humanity had rebuilt " as they always did- and scoured the stars once more. Went to war once more.

Part of John wished that war would end forever. Another part, a voice in his head that reminded him of a long lost friend pointed out that he would then be out of a job.

Not that there's much more to be done here, he mused. Oh, forget that Reach had been an important military planet, and that it was good publicity to know that the Spartan that saved humanity was involved in the restoration project. John, despite his lack of understanding of deceit and trickery and politics in his younger years, was not a fool.

They didn't know what to do with him. After the Didact's attack on Earth, the UNSC had commended him, given him a new set of MJOLNIR GEN3 armour and then"what? There were no wars to fight, not really. Jul Mdama's remnant had gone underground, and the Insurrectionists had been placated for now with promise of government reforms. So what was a soldier needed to do?

And so, he was here, on a planet he didn't know anymore, with no friends, no other Spartans, and no else to speak to.

He hated it. Hated having nothing to do. More than anything, it meant he had to think about Cortana. The fact that she was gone. That brilliant voice in the back of his head, throwing quips and tactical information his way whenever he had needed it. They could give him another AI, maybe even another Cortana. But it wouldn't be _her._

John took one last look over the city, watching as the sun began to set and bathed the horizon in fire and amber, before leaving.

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After his return to Earth, plans had been made. Some had opposed them, wishing that John's return to be kept secret. Those voices ultimately fell on deaf ears, and he had been told that there would be a celebration in his honour. In the months that passed, the Master Chief took some much needed leave "or something like it- to fill himself in on the last few years he had missed in cryo. He was briefed on the newly-realised Spartan branch, which he declined to join, and found out the fates of his many brothers and sisters that had survived the war. John had also discovered that ONI had declassified many elements of the SPARTAN-II Program, including files on the families of the Spartans, and Doctor Halsey's supposed war crimes.

John had never understood the reasons why there was so much ceremony for him; there were many other soldiers out there who had given and lost more. John was simply stronger, fasterâ€|better. It didn't make him more deserving of praise. Just better at getting the mission done.

Tomorrow was the day those plans would culminate. There would be parades, and medals and speeches. Lots of military fanfare, and a lot of time sitting still for no reason. And it would be seen across human space, broadcast over the Galactic Web, for billions of humans to watch. Lord Hood would be in attendance to oversee the majority of it, along with a large amount of HIGHCOM.

It would be a security nightmare.

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Tomorrow became today, and John was being driven into Skyfall City, in the back of an Armadillo APC flanked by local police on bikes. The city square had been taken over; a huge stage had been erected, with hundreds of seats placed in ordered rows. Cameras and recording equipment were abound. He didn't like it. Too little cover, too many places an assassin could hide a bomb or find a position to snipe from. There were a lot of guards about, admittedly; military and local police, with a few Mosquito drones for good measure.

The APC arrived, and the Chief exited, clad in his full MJOLNIR rig. He was greeted by a Spartan-IV, clad in grey scout armour sans the helmet. Sarah Palmer, commander of the _Infinity_'s Spartan complement. She saluted briefly, which Chief returned, before addressing him. "Master Chief, I've been assigned security oversight."

Chief nodded in understanding. "Everything alright?"

Palmer sighed. "More or less. If you'd come this way, the theatrics monkey needs to run you through what's going to happen."

He followed her as she made her way across the stage. "What's the security situation?"

"Well, we shouldn't have to worry about Remnant forces." She began. "But there's always the chance of an Innies setting up shop in any of these apartment buildings that we can't spot."

"That bad?" Chief asked sympathetically.

"Nightmare. And we've got so much of the top brass here."

"One explosion could do a lot of damage." Chief agreed sagely, as they arrived at a point behind the main stage, where three men in formal attire were clustered around a table full of tablets and datapads.

"Master Chief has arrived, Mister Ramsey." Palmer informed them.

The three looked up, with a mixture of excitement and intimidation. Chief was a good seven feet tall, at least a head taller than the leader. Ramsey moved from the table to greet the Spartan. He was in

his late fifties, and well-groomed without a hair out of place.
"Hello, ahâ€¦"

"Master Chief will do." John said simply.

"Okayâ€¦Master Chief." Ramsey hesitated. "I'm Jack Ramsey, event co-ordinator for this whole ceremony."

He extended his hand, which Chief took, but didn't say anything. Ramsey seemed put off by his silence, but nonetheless carried on. He ended up explaining the whole schedule for the day. It took the best part of an hour for him to explain to Chief exactly where and how he was meant to stand, when he was meant to moveâ€¦he paid attention as best he could, trying to turn it into an exercise in discipline, like the ones from Mendez back in training. The helmet served well to hide his discomfort.

"Now let's run through it a second timeâ€¦"

It took a lot of willpower not to groan.

/

It had become a bloodbath.

Remnant Elites had snuck deep into the city, infiltrated the city square. The ceremony had been in full swing when they dropped their active camouflage cloaks and began to fire into the crowd. The civilians furthest away had managed to flee, but far too many human corpses littered the square. Half of the security detail had been wiped out in the opening wave, and the rest were now engaged in a full-on firefight with the Elites.

Chief was in cover behind the same Armadillo he had arrived in, now busted and broken and peppered with plasma fire. Palmer â€" the only other Spartan on-site â€" was similarly in cover on the other side of the plaza, protecting Lord Hood â€" one of the few remaining HIGHCOM members still alive.

His COM lit up as he leaned out of cover to fire a burst from his assault rifle at an Elite. "Palmer to Chief â€" we have to get Hood out of here. My signal to Infinity is jammed but local forces are enroute to extract Hood to secure bunker Whiskey; ETA seven minutes."

"Copy that. Camo Elite flanking on your two."

There was a spray of bullets from her position and an Elite exploded in a shower of blue sparks as his stealth module was overloaded. "Got him".

Chief assessed the situation. Two Spartans, one VIP. The twelve remaining members of the security detail. Sixteen Elites, with equipment and armour different to standard SpecOps. Not horrible odds, but the Elites kept relocating using their active camouflage.

The Spartan moved out of his cover and sprinted towards the stage. A few shots hit him, but the shields held and he made it to his new cover: the large marble podium that Hood had been speaking at

earlier. The soldier in-charge of the Mosquito drones had gone down quicker, rendering the drones inert but still usable. His corpse was only five feet away from the podium, but Chief had attracted a lot of attention and most of the plasma fire was coming his way, wearing away at his cover.

"I need cover fire to retrieve the drone controls." He requested calmly over the COM, wearily observing his cover's erosion.

"Marines, suppressive fire in threeâ€|twoâ€|one- fire!"

Chief dove out of his cover and rolled over to the soldier's body. The TACPAD was thankfully intact, and he snatched it up before diving back into his cover. "Controls retrieved, slaving the drones to my HUD."

It only took a few seconds for the three remaining drones to reactive, but the quadrotors activated and rose quickly from the ground before buzzing around the battlefield. They provided a much needed distraction, and Chief had them concentrate on one Elite at a time, swarming it and bringing it down with the combined fire of their small machine guns. Chief would aim for a different enemy, as would the marines and Palmer. Within two minutes, the remaining Elites were down.

Palmer and Lord Hood were quickly by Chief's side, just as the reinforcements arrived. Marines piled out the back of one of the APCs.

The leader of the fireteam quickly marched over to the three. "Sergeant Blake, Lima Squad. We're your escort to Whiskey, sir."

"Then let's get out of here." Hood spoke, and they began to pile in to the APC. "What's the situation, Sergeant?"

"It's bad, Sir." Blake said hurriedly. "Communications are jammed, and we've got Covies deploying all over the city. Civilian casualties are low at the moment, but we've got word that there's a Corvette over ONI Base Bullhorn."

The APC pulled away, with an escort of two police bikes in front, and a pair of Warthogs taking up the rear. Cars reluctantly pulled to the side, but some roads were simply too blocked and choked up with fleeing traffic to allow them to pass, requiring them to constantly reroute and turn into other streets.

Chief moved to the driver's cabin of the vehicle. "How long to Whiskey, soldier?"

"Should be there in five, Chief, so long as we've got a clear route."

Bright blue light began to fill the sky, as the blue sheen of an energy shield criss-crossed overhead. "They're boxing us in with an energy dome." Blake confirmed.

Chief noticed a more immediate problem. "Driver, get us away from the Space Elevator."

"Why? Ohâ€¦shit."

The dome arced overhead, taller than most of the buildings apart from a single structure; a pillar of rings reaching high up into the sky. The shield sliced through the elevator like water; it twisted, buckled, began to collapse and fall. Everything above the shield crashed on top and slid away down the dome, but the section inside the dome came down hard, crashing into buildings and creating a cascade of buckled metal and concrete. A dust cloud was thrown up, and the driver slammed the brakes on and brought the APC to a halt.

One of the escort bikes stopped as well. The other went into a wall, blinded by the dust. The two Warthogs were able to skid to a halt. The road was empty apart from a few abandoned cars, luckily. It seemed like they had been the only ones actually heading deeper into the city.

"Everyone okay?" Palmer called out.

There was a round of groans and assertions. "All good."

"We need to get this shield down and COMs with the fleet back up." Hood asserted. "Do we have a location for the shield emitter or jammers?"

"Lord Hood, we still need to get you to Whiskey." Palmer reminded him.

"Suggestions?" Hood asked.

Chief spoke up. "Escort Hood to the bunker. I'll find the emitter and jammer."

Blake chimed in, and pulled out a datapad. "It's the one location, Sir."

He brought up a map of the city, and pointed out the specific area. "It was dropped in by the Corvette before it moved on to the ONI base. Seems to be the source of the COM interference as well."

Chief nodded. "Push the location to my HUD. I'll move on foot."

Blake reached over and palmed the rear door release, which then opened to reveal the street. "Get the platform down and we can get reinforcements from _Infinity._ Good hunting."

Chief nodded, and marched out. The ramp closed up behind him, and he raised his fist and banged on the door. The APC drove off, with the surviving escorts in tow. He briefly checked his TACMAP; the platform Blake had described was about two and a half miles east. He brought up an objective marker â€" Cortana normally did that for him â€" and checked his ammunition. Three spare clips for his MA5D, one spare clip for his pistol. No grenades or explosives. He'd need something to deal with the structure.

He set off in the direction of the spire. Most of the inhabitants had fled, though as he jogged through the streets he saw the occasional

terrified face in a window. He could hear the sounds of battle in the distance, more to the western side of the city.

Least it means I'm less likely to run into enemies. He hoped, anyways.

The Chief emerged out into a small park, and immediately dived behind a low wall; a Covenant squad had taken up a position the square, setting up a plasma turret; currently manned by a single Grunt.

He activated his VISR mode, and the world became outlined in a slight tint of yellow. The Covenant were enveloped in red, but there was a lack of friendly green forces. Other objects â€" spare weapons, crates, vehicles were highlighted as well. He surveyed the area, looking for an opportunity. He needed to dispatch them quickly or sneak by.

The Chief cursed and shrank closer to the wall as the low hum of a Phantom filled the air, swinging into view from around the back of a building. It slowed, before coming to hang over the Covenant squad. An idea surfaced in Chief's mind.

He leapt from his cover and sprinted towards the dropship. He threw himself into the grav-lift that appeared and rose into the ship. The Jackal pilot turned in surprise but before it could do anything Chief had rammed his combat knife into its neck, before twisted and pulling it out sideways. Blood spattered over the console, and Chief found himself the winner of a shiny new Phantom.

He pulled the corpse free of the command chair, and accessed the forward-mounted plasma cannon. It swivelled and turned to face the squad outside, and unleashed the blue fire upon them, blasting them away. That done, he appropriated more of the controls, and set in a course to the platform Blake had tagged for him.

The Phantom rose, spun in the air, and flew shakily. The controls, thankfully, were not too dissimilar to a Pelican's and Chief was able to keep it on a steady course. He spied a lot of Covenant anti-air defences that had been rigged up on the many rooftops, and decided that the enemy was unaware of their craft's new pilot. That was good. It meant he would be able to approach the objective without resistance.

He lit up his COM. "This is Spartan-One-One-Seven to UNSCDF forces; I have commandeered an enemy Phantom and I am enroute to the site of the shield projector. Over."

A voice â€" whoever was overseeing the defense of the city â€" replied: "Copy that. Good hunting, Chief. I'll make sure my men don't shoot you down. Out."

The objective came into view. In a way, the structure reminded Chief of the Spires the Covenant had used during the war. It was a good five hundred feet tall and fifty wide, with three legs shaped like pincers which held up a central dome, all in the Covenant's trademark purple. A pillar of light extended from the highest point of the dome, powering the shield overhead.

The Phantom lacked the firepower to destroy it directly. So that left one other option. Chief tightened his grip around the control stick,

and pushed the dropship into a faster speed. The Phantom picked up momentum, and soon it was racing towards the Spire; when he didn't divert his course, warning lights began to whine and flash across the dashboard and viewport. When he still didn't divert, confused alien speech blared from hidden speakers, demanding to know what the Phantom was doing. And then he was too close for any anti-air to take a shot at him; so he unbuckled the crash webbing and locked in the flight path, before leaving the cockpit and bracing himself in the Phantom's main hold.

The tower was in for a treat.

* * *

><p>AN:**_ _As always, please read and review. I hope you enjoyed it._

2. Bigger Guns Nearby

**Disclaimer: **See Chapter 1.

_A/N:_Sorry for the delay, stuff came up. It's not a long one but there's a fair bit in it. Enjoy._

* * *

><p>Halo 5 â€" The Darkest Hour_

Chapter 2 â€" Bigger Guns Nearby

* * *

><p>"This is Spartan-One-One-Seven to Commander Palmer. Do you copy?"<p>

There was a crackle of static in the speakers before a voice broke through. "Chief. Receiving you loud and clear. Well done. Any difficulties?"

John looked around. The top of the spire he had crashed the Phantom into was in total ruin. The floor was ripped open like torn paper, dead Covenant were everywhere and the shield pylon was a smoking, broken mess of twisted purple metal. "Negative."

"Alright. I'm sending a Pelican to your location. The Covies are grouping in force around Bullhorn Base a few clicks from here. Spartans, Army and Marines are assembling a force to break through and secure the facility."

"Copy, Commander."

"Palmer out." And the line went dead.

With the energy dome down, the _Infinity _was free to send down reinforcements. In the distance John could see the trails and specks of SOEIV drop pods racing down from orbit, carrying ODSTs or Spartans into battle.

Most of the Remnant forces had been routed from the city. Their

attack had been a distraction rather than the objective proper. So that meant they were after something in Bullhorn. An artefact from Requiem perhaps? Chief didn't know. He did know, however, that if the UNSC had some Forerunner device locked away there, no good would ever come of it.

His COM crackled. "Master Chief, this is Pelican-Two-Nine-Nine, we are on approach west of your position."

He turned to the west and sure enough he could see the silhouette of the grey-green dropship. Its engines roared as it approached, before swinging round. The pilot didn't bother to extend landing gear, instead it merely hovered before the edge of the tower, rear bay doors open. Chief calmly stepped inside, unfazed by the gap and the doors sealed and the Pelican pulled away.

The pilot spoke over the intercom. "Welcome aboard. We're en route to Rally Point Alpha. They're staging a return attack for Bullhorn."

"How is the city?"

"Intact, thankfully." The pilot's ID came up as Jackson "Rumble" Rhodes replied. "Minimum casualties too."

"Good to hear." Chief said quietly.

"Any idea what they're after, Chief?"

"No."

* * *

><p>Palmer was there to greet him as he dismounted the Pelican. "Nice work, Chief. Come on, Control's this way."<p>

Wordlessly, he followed her through the encampment, quietly observing the piles of munitions and rows of Warthogs, Scorpions and Armadillo APCs. Marines and soldiers jogged from one place to another organising troop formations, requisitions and equipment.

They arrived at a tent guarded by a pair of Spartans in the basic grey and gold MJOLNIR GEN2. Palmer walked past them into the tent and the Chief followed. Inside were several sergeants and lieutenants. Hood and the _Infinity's_ commander, Tom Lasky, were represented via hologram.

"Good to see you Chief." Lasky commented.

Chief simply nodded. "What's the situation?"

Pete Stacker stepped forward. "We've got Covies all over Bullhorn. Damned ONI won't tell us what they've got in there though. Could be a stick of gum from the Forerunners for all we know."

"Have we got recon?" Palmer asked.

Stacker nodded. "Heavy triple-A, so we're gonna have to break down the front door. About five hundred covies plus vehicles. Our force is about four hundred strong, but I'm hoping the _Infinity_ can provide

us some heavenly support."

"We'll do our best, sergeant." Lasky promised.

"Bullhorn is basically in a canyon." Stacker continued, bringing up a map of the area. "Real easy to defend."

"Great for us." Palmer commented sarcastically. "How'd the Covies get in so quickly anyways?"

"Bigass ship cannons would be enough to make most boys and girls shit their pants." Stacker grunted. "Now, the canyon has a sizable entrance here." He indicated on the map. "But there's a lot of enemy armour between here and there. If we can get a small team through to disable the triple-A, we'll be able to hot-insert reinforcements."

"Our armour column from the Lancers and the thirty-third will roll on the enemy armour line after a mortar barrage."

"Sounds doable." Lasky commented.

"I know." Stacker deadpanned. "That's why we're doing it."

"Okay, if the Army and Marines can provide an opening, I'll put Chief in charge of a Spartan fireteam to disable the anti-air." Palmer turned to Chief. "Unless he's getting old?"

John smiled slightly behind his helmet. "Not yet."

"Then we're done here." Hood said. "Stacker, I want you rolling on Bullhorn within the hour."

"Aye, sir."

"Good luck."

* * *

><p>Palmer led Chief over to a small group of Spartans next to munitions crates marked "SM". She turned to Chief and explained. "Spartan branch decided to invest in weaponry optimised for Spartans. We have ten weapon systems in the works, but only two are in the prototype stage."<p>

She turned to one of the Spartans. "Marcus, get a One and a Two for Chief."

"Right away, ma'am."

She turned back to Chief. "Technically, since you're not part of Spartan branch you shouldn't be getting these. But since its you, I think we're allowed an exception."

"Thanks." John replied dryly.

"Once we've got you geared up, I'll have you assigned to Fireteam Excalibur."

Spartan Marcus returned holding a pair of boxes, which Chief guessed

would contain a rifle and a pistol. He accepted them both and set the smaller of the two down before opening the larger one. Inside was indeed a rifle. Sliver-grey furniture dominated an otherwise black finish, with integrated sights and ammunition counter. Strangely, unlike the majority of rifles the UNSC fielded, it wasn't a bullpup design; the magazine was inserted directly in front of the trigger guard. It was also slightly heavier.

"The SM-One" Palmer explained. "Uses downscaled railgun tech to function like an assault rifle. Fires deforming slugs, forty-round magazine. It'll tear through flesh and armour easily enough but the bullet design had to be reworked not to bounce off shields."

"Feels good." Chief commented, hefting it and looking down the sights.

"it's reinforced, so feel free to crack a split-jaw over the head with it. And it has select fire modes; auto, semi and four-round burst."

Chief nodded and attached it to his back. The SM-2 pistol was designed with similar principles, with a reinforced body and magnetic acceleration technology to fire .50 cal slugs.

"Have fun." Palmer said in amusement. "I'll have Excalibur sent over."

She turned and left, leaving Chief alone to examine his new weapons and stock up on ammunition and grenades. He hoped the increased lethality would offset the inability to share ammunition pools with the marines.

A few minutes later, four Spartans approached, all similarly armed like he was with the SM weapons, although one had traded the rifle for a Stanchion gauss rifle and another had done the same for a M45 Shotgun.

"Master Chief," The leading one began "a woman, if he had to guess. "Jane Banks, I'll be your second in command."

Chief nodded and accepted her hand for a handshake. The other three introduced themselves too. There was Terry Stinson in his red and black EOD armour, demolitions expert. The shotgun-wielding and blue armoured James McDonald and the squad's marksman, Jun-A266 "A Spartan-III.

"Were you in command before, Jane?"

"No sir, we're a patchwork fireteam." She explained. "We've been reassigned from other units."

Chief nodded. "Are you aware of our role?"

Terry cut in. "Blowing up the second load of Covenant stuff, after the tanks blow up the first set."

Jane sighed. "We're fully briefed sir. Just tell us where to go."

* * *

><p>"Reminds me of a battle in the Viery territoryâ€|" Jun commented. The armour column had rolled out from the rally point an hour ago. Twenty-three warthogs and eight tanks, with twelve APCs trailing behind. "Although we had just finished fighting for an ONI base that time."<p>

Chief listened from the seat next to the driver in the cabin, but didn't respond.

"Back when you were with Noble?" James asked eagerly. He wasn't green, but he didn't have much more than a tour of Requiem under his belt, having signed up at the conclusion of the Human-Covenant War, but his supposed creativity on the battlefield got him fast-tracked for Spartan training.

"Yes." Jun answered quietly. "A long time ago now."

The vehicle convoy raced across the sandy plains, and with ten-minutes to their arrival at Bullhorn, Sarah Palmer's voice rang out over the COM and a video feed appeared in Chief's HUD. "Alright Excalibur, it's almost go time. Since you're the only Spartan team on this attack I'll be your direct handler. I've managed to requisition a TAMP and OBSP platform for you."

"Thank you, Commander." Chief replied.

"Bombardment's about to begin. Good hunting." Palmer left the COM.

"Ohoo, can't wait to see the mortar-boom." Terry grinned cheerfully. "And thereâ€|weâ€|go!"

The Covenant line was a trail of purple on the horizon â€" a mass of Wraiths, Revenants and Ghosts. Trails of smoke lanced and criss-crossed overhead before arcing down towards the purple line. The first volley hit, then the second, then the third, and within a minute the armour line was in flames.

"Ready up." Chief ordered, checking his SM-1. "Our armour's about to hit the line."

The mortar-fire had taken out a huge chunk of the enemy force, but enough remained to pose a significant threat and offer strong resistance. The Warthogs and Scorpions crashed into the purple line, and all hell broke loose. The Warthogs were darting about, weaving between destroyed Wraiths and offering hit and run tactics while the Scorpions simply went over them, firing large 105mm shells at anything still alien and alive.

"Driver, can you get us through?"

"Hang on to your guns, people!" And the Armadillo was in the mess as well, dancing through the wreckage. Chief could hear the melting splash of plasma flashing the paintwork off. The other APCs would be about twenty seconds behind.

Chief moved to the back of the APC, and took point. Jane moved over to the door release. "As soon as we stop at the tunnel entrance, hit it."

Jane nodded. "Everyone ready?"

A round of affirmatives. A few seconds later, the Spartans were swung to the left as the APC skidded to a halt. Jane hit the release and the back of the Armadillo burst open and the five Spartans piled out, firing on the Covenant charged with guarding the tunnel.

"Well, this is a welcome party and a half!" Terry called out, firing from the hip as he went for cover. Chief slid in next to him behind the empty weapons crate while the other three ducked behind the APC to go to the left and flank.

He decided to see if the SM-1 was worth its weight and stood up over the cover and opened fire. The magnetic acceleration meant there was no recoil and the rounds tore into an Elite with ease, putting down the red Major with only a little under twelve shots.

It would do, Chief decided.

"Tossing a grenade." James called, and a green ball was flung into the midst of the guard. It exploded, sending chunks of Grunts and Jackals everywhere.

"Move up!" Chief called. "Stack up for breach."

They moved up to the sealed tunnel doors - twenty feet high, twenty long and at least a foot thick. It wouldn't be a problem for Terry. "Planting a burner-charge."

The team took up positions as the APC took its leave. The tunnel would be about a hundred feet long before leading into Bullhorn base's courtyard. Terry looked at the Chief expectantly. "Ready?"

"Three..twoâ€|oneâ€|" He raised his rifle.

"Mark."

* * *

><p>It took them the best part of fifteen minutes to fight all the way through the tunnel and to breach the courtyard. And, as James had put it, they had emerged from the tunnel into a shitstorm. Covies on the ground with Fuel Rod Cannons, Covies on the roofs with Beam Riflesâ€|Excalibur had been scattered across the courtyard by now, constantly moving to avoid being vaporised by plasma fire.<p>

"Suggestions, boss?" Jun asked dryly over COM. "Not that I'm not enjoying myself y'know."

Chief leaned out of cover, took a few shots then went back in. "Cover me."

And he jumped out from his hiding place, and charged at the Covenant.

"What the hell is he doing?!" James yelled out, quickly followed by a curse as a stray shot hit his shields.

Chief dived into the fray of soldiers, so close that he didn't need to aim, simply firing his rifle in his right hand and his pistol in the left. He kicked a grunt away, dropped his rifle and snapped a Jackals neck, then in perhaps one of the most reckless and most stupid moves he had ever pulled, he snatched a Fuel Rod Cannon from a Grunt, and fired it at the ground.

The explosion sent him flying and battered him to hell, before triggering a chain of tertiary explosions as the plasma grenades and batteries went up. Jun took advantage of this and used the distraction to snipe the rooftop Jackals. The other three Spartans pressed as well, and within three minutes the courtyard was clear.

Chief lay on the ground dazed, his shields beeping at him before slowly beginning to regenerate. The world was spinning. Why the hell had he done that? Cortana would have torn him a new one if she had still been with him.

_Sorry, Cortana.

"Chief?" Someone was standing over him. "Still in there?"

"Should we call a medic?"

Chief pulled himself together and sat up with an effort. "I'm fine."

Terry snorted. "That was a fucking crazy thing to do. Even for me."

"Glad I could impress." Chief grunted, before getting to his feet. He looked around for his rifle, then realised the explosion had turned it to slag. A pity. He had liked it.

Palmer chose that moment to join the discussion. "Chief, what the hell was that?"

Terry laughed. "Miss, I do believe its called "Crazy"."

"Can it, Stinson." She snapped. "Chief, you and I will be discussing this later. I'll send you down some ordinance. Palmer out."

"Well." James chuckled. "I thought it was kinda badass. But she'll have your balls now, man- er, sir."

Chief groaned. He really shouldn't have done it. "Got the job done."

Jane brought John a new rifle from Palmer's ordinance drop. "Try not to vape this one?" and Jun and Terry set about disabling the AA guns. Ten minutes later, the rest of the combined ground force had pulled into the courtyard and there were Pelicans and Falcons en route with additional weapons and reinforcements. A wing of Longswords and Shortswords had come and chased away the Corvette. They had the base surrounded.

"Do we have any idea what they're after yet?" Chief asked hopefully.

Stacker shook his head. "No idea son. They're not getting out with it though. Just got word from Lasky; All the ships jumped to slipspace half an hour ago and anyone groundside is dead or captured. That lot inside is all that's left."

Chief nodded. The attack had proved to be a short one. The battle in the square had only been about twelve hours ago. "What happens now?"

Stacker grinned. "We go in there and kill every alien son of a bitch we find."

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><p>AN: **Well, there we go. The Second Battle of Reach should be wrapped up next chapter. As always, read, review and enjoy._

End
file.